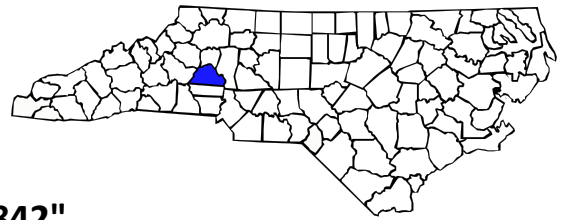


CATAWBA COUNTY PROFILE...



"Keeping the Spirit Alive Since 1842"

Located in a peaceful valley just east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Catawba County is a land of scenic beauty, diverse cultures, and thriving industry. Three beautiful lakes are located within its 405 square miles, and the Catawba River winds along its western, northern, and eastern border. The County is named for the river and the Catawba Indians who foraged in the valley and were friendly and helpful to the first settlers who arrived in 1747.

Catawba County was officially established on December 12, 1842, when Lincoln County was divided by an act of the North Carolina General Assembly. Citizens living in what is now Catawba County found it was too far to travel to Lincolnton, the Lincoln County seat, to conduct court business on a regular basis. Catawba County's seat was not selected until January 8, 1845. The North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation to the effect that "the present Town of Newton as selected and laid out shall be the site and location of the courthouse and jail of Catawba County." The final boundary line was moved to a point further north of Lincolnton than the line originally drawn, with the current boundary lying five and a half miles north of Lincolnton.

The County has eight cities and towns: Hickory, Newton, Conover, Maiden, Catawba, Claremont, Longview, and Brookford, and a total population of 153,784. The average temperature is 69 degrees Fahrenheit with an average high of 51 degrees in January and 85 degrees in June. On average, the County receives about fifty inches of rainfall and seven inches of snowfall per year. The average elevation in Catawba County is 1,165 feet.

Catawba County, the central county of North Carolina's fourth largest MSA, has successfully diversified and balanced its traditional manufacturing base of furniture, textile, and telecommunications. However, the layoffs of the last few years have been a challenge to traditional industries that have in the past benefited from Catawba County's economy being based on manufacturing. Comprehensive efforts are being directed at identifying and recruiting new sectors in manufacturing such as biomedical, pharmaceutical, technology and building products, and identifying and recruiting non-manufacturing sectors such as retirement and retail development. The once tight labor force has transitioned into a pool of skilled workers loyal to the area and its industries.

The Hickory Metro area has been named the 10th Best Place to Live and Raise a Family in the United States by *Reader's Digest*. The Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA has also been named the 3rd best MSA in the country for Business Costs by *Forbes Magazine*. *Business North Carolina* magazine also reported that Catawba County's largest city, Hickory, was the 8th best city in the State for its quality of life.

Catawba County is renowned as the center of the region's retail shopping, entertainment, and culture life. A leading retail mall, furniture mart, convention center, movie theaters, retail

shopping centers, and hundreds of restaurants are also major attractions for visitors from throughout the region.

Catawba County has 40 public schools with over 25,000 students and is home to two colleges: Lenoir-Rhyne College, a 116 year old liberal arts institution and Catawba Valley Community College, a member of the North Carolina Community College system, which offers one and two year degree programs and a two year college transfer program as well as continuing education classes. The County is a major medical center, with two large hospitals, a substantial medical community, and many nursing home facilities.

Catawba County offers a wide range of sports and recreation for enthusiasts of every kind. Rock Barn Golf & Spa is home to the Greater Hickory Classic, a PGA TOUR Champions Tour Event. The Hickory Motor Speedway hosts the NASCAR Dodge Weekly Series and is known as the "Birthplace of the NASCAR Stars." 2004 South Atlantic League Champion Hickory Crawdads (Class A Affiliate – Pittsburg Pirates) offer minor league baseball at its best. Catawba County also has numerous parks that provide opportunities ranging from family picnics to hiking and fishing.

There are over 200 congregations in Catawba County representing a variety of Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and other beliefs. All major protestant religions are represented with the largest number of adherents belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Methodist Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

Catawba County offers a wide range of housing choices. From newly constructed subdivisions, townhomes, and condos to historic homes and a variety of apartment choices, there are numerous available housing options. The average cost of a single-family home is \$154,400. The average rental rate for a 2-bedroom apartment is \$531. 62.48% of the population owns their homes, while 32.35% of the population is renters.